

Press release

27 May 2005

Foster and Partners to unveil designs for Dallas Winspear Opera House

Foster and Partners will unveil designs for the Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House on 27 May 2005 at a public presentation of the 'schematic design'. The building will be the principal performance venue in the new Performing Arts District of Dallas, and will stage opera, ballet, music-theatre and other large-scale productions.

The plans to build the Winspear Opera House are evidence of the Dallas Opera Company's dedication and commitment to excellence and innovation. The new building represents a radical rethinking of the traditional opera experience. It addresses the questions: 'What is the nature of the opera house in the twenty-first century; and how can we create a building that offers a model for the future?' It creates an open, accessible forum that is a world-class arts venue, yet has the qualities of a generous civic space.

The design of the opera house follows on from Foster and Partner's formulation of a masterplan for the Performing Arts District, which will eventually contain other performing arts buildings designed by Pritzker Prize winners: Rem Koolhaas, IM Pei and Renzo Piano. Together these new venues represent the most ambitious cultural building project in the city's history. Designed to ensure accessibility and legibility within a pedestrian-friendly environment, the new buildings will relate to one another along the 'green spine' of Flora Street. The Winspear Opera House faces the Grand Plaza and the

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Annette Strauss Artist's Square performing space and will provide a focal point for the entire district.

The ambition is to create a building that will not only be fully integrated within the cultural life of Dallas, but will become a destination in its own right - welcoming the non-opera going public with a restaurant, café and bookstore, accessible throughout the day. Organisationally, the Winspear 'reinvents' the form of the traditional opera house, inverting its closed, hierarchical form to create a transparent, publicly welcoming series of spaces that wrap around the rich red drum of the 2,200-seat auditorium.

The auditorium is designed to encourage a sense of intimacy with the performers. This is expressed by a special attention to detail and finishes which improve the resonance of the human voice and allow the orchestra to sound rich and complex. There are means to adjust the acoustic performance of the space using retractable screens, which allow the flexibility to stage amplified or Broadway productions. These systems, together with the sound and lighting, convey a sense of immediacy to maximise the theatrical experience for artists and audience alike.

In elevation the building is transparent, its glass walls revealing views of the public concourse, upper-level foyers and grand staircase. Entered beneath a solar canopy, which shades the outdoor spaces from the heat of the sun, the transition from the Grand Plaza, through the foyer, into the auditorium is designed to heighten the drama of attending a performance - in effect, 'to take the theatre to the audience'.

Leading the team for the Winspear Opera House, Spencer de Grey said, "As a principal building within the Performing Arts District, The Winspear Opera House will balance the need to provide a civic space that is accessible and inviting, with the demands of creating

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an unrivalled performance venue for the city."

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